

First Requested Federal Assistance On [April 29th](#)
May 24, 2010

WASHINGTON D.C. – Following multiple requests from Congressman Charlie Melancon (LA-03), today the federal government issued a fisheries disaster declaration, paving the way for financial assistance for Louisiana fishermen. In response to the declaration, Congressman Melancon pledged to secure funding for the fisheries assistance, and fight to hold BP accountable for the cost.

“The BP oil spill in the Gulf has been devastating for Louisiana fishermen and small business owners who depend on the Gulf for their livelihood,” said Congressman Melancon. **“I’ve been fighting to get the federal government to understand how serious an impact this will have on our economy, and I welcome this official disaster declaration. Now it’s up to Congress to fully fund this effort quickly. I won’t support any emergency funding bill that doesn’t include immediate help for our coast.**

“After Katrina and Rita, it took far too long for federal dollars to reach the people on the ground who needed the assistance the most. Make no mistake: that will not happen again. Fishermen and small business owners are already struggling, and I will work to make sure we get them the financial help they need as quickly as possible.

“Disaster assistance is a start, but every day that goes by that BP can’t shut down that well, more and more fishermen will suffer today tomorrow and for years to come.”

Congressman Melancon began calling for a fisheries disaster declaration last month, when he told the head of NOAA’s Fisheries Service and the Secretary of Commerce that the oil intrusion resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster would likely damage the fragile habitats that Louisiana’s fishermen, oystermen, and shrimpers depend on.

The full text of Congressman Melancon’s letter to NOAA’s Fisheries Service is copied below. A signed final copy can be viewed online [here](#) .

April 29, 2010

Eric C. Schwaab
Assistant Administrator
NOAA Fisheries Service
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Assistant Administrator Schwaab,

As repeated efforts to close the open well head at the Deepwater Horizon disaster site have failed, I urge you to prepare to direct disaster funding for the commercial and recreational

fisheries industries in South Louisiana. Many of our fisheries and oyster beds are slated to open in the coming days and weeks. This hazardous oil intrusion will almost certainly have a detrimental impact on the fragile ecosystems that our seafood industry relies on.

As you know, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Department of Commerce have authority under the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (16 U.S.C. § 4107) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C § 1861) to provide assistance to fishing communities affected by a disaster. NMFS will play a key role in designating this accident as a disaster and allocating funding to Louisiana and our fisheries. I will work in Congress to be sure the appropriate funds are available to draw down.

Every effort must be made – and made quickly -- to restrain the growing environmental and economic disaster off the coast of my state. But following these exhaustive efforts, it is imperative that we quickly enact all appropriate disaster funding for Louisiana's fisherman, oystermen and shrimpers.

Sincerely,

Charlie Melancon
Member of Congress

cc: U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke

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